

## Secretary Rice Interview With Zain Verjee of CNN

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Sheraton Hotel  
Warsaw, Poland  
August 20, 2008

**QUESTION:** Secretary Rice, thank you very much. Is it worth provoking Russia over this missile defense agreement when the priority is really to get Russia out of Georgia?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, first of all, there should be nothing provocative about this missile defense for Russia. We have done everything that we can to demonstrate practically that this missile defense system is aimed at 21<sup>st</sup> century threats, small missile threats of the kind that an Iran or a North Korea could offer. And the Russians fully understand that this could not possibly threaten their deterrent. And so --

**QUESTION:** But they don't. They're saying the perception is --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I frankly think they do.

**QUESTION:** -- that it's a direct threat to them and the timing is bad.

**SECRETARY RICE:** I have to tell you, I frankly think that anybody who can do the math would know that 10 interceptors in Poland is not going to do anything to a Russian deterrent that has thousands of warheads. Now in terms of the timing, the timing is coincidental. We have been working on this agreement for quite a long time with Poland. It came to fruition. And I'm very proud to have come here to sign it with our very good allies, the Poles.

**QUESTION:** But it doesn't really help with the situation, the confrontation with Russia right now, whether it was coincidental or not.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, it's not an issue of confrontation with Russia. That is a separate matter. The Russians need to be out of Georgia. They are the ones who brutally attacked a small neighbor. They are the ones who are bombing civilian ports. They are the ones who are causing havoc along the east-west highway of Georgia and still, despite the promises of their president, in Georgian cities with their troops. So this missile defense program, this agreement is something that we were always going to sign when it is ready. It's ready.

**QUESTION:** And it's ready and signed, but the effect of that is that the Russians are now threatening Poland with a nuclear attack.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I want to associate myself with what Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said yesterday: that's pathetic. The Russians must know that we have an Article 5 guarantee to Poland. As a member of NATO, they must know that the United States would never permit an attack on the territory of an ally under Article 5. And finally, they do know that this missile defense system is not aimed at them. This is aimed at other kinds of threats, by the way, threats that also are there for Russia. And it's why we have offered missile defense cooperation.

**QUESTION:** So the U.S. would defend Poland militarily if they had to?

**SECRETARY RICE:** The United States has an Article 5 commitment --

**QUESTION:** So it would?

**SECRETARY RICE:** -- to defend Poland.

**QUESTION:** So it's obliged to, aren't they?

**SECRETARY RICE:** It is obliged to.

**QUESTION:** You say that missile defense is really to confront the new threats in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Iran, North Korea. But isn't the real threat the old threat, Russia? Did you underestimate Russia?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Oh, I think we certainly tried to give Russia an opportunity to demonstrate that it was a different Russia, a Russia that was ready to integrate into the international, diplomatic, political, security, economic efforts at cooperation, institutions of cooperation that exist. It is still the right policy for the West and it's still the right policy for Russia. It's unfortunate that Russia has not taken up that offer and has, instead, gone back to what sometimes appear to be old habits, which is demonstrating that they can use military power against a small neighbor.

**QUESTION:** So -- but this was a surprise --

**SECRETARY RICE:** No, no.

**QUESTION:** -- that the Russians bulldozed their way --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Zain, this is --

**QUESTION:** -- and extended beyond South Ossetia?

**SECRETARY RICE:** As I've said, this is --

**QUESTION:** So it seems as though it was --

**SECRETARY RICE:** This has been going on for a while with the Russians. We have had strategic aviation flying against not just the United States, but against Norway, for instance. We have had evidence of cyber attacks against Estonia, it's been going on for a while. We've really been very firm with the Russians about the need for it to stop. This particular zone of conflict has been volatile for some time and we've been engaged in diplomatic efforts to try and improve the situation there. But this time, the Russians have gone far beyond anything that could be -- seem to be associated with defense of their people.

**QUESTION:** But other former Soviet republics are really frightened right now. They're scared and they're looking at the situation and thinking, is Russia going to attack them? Does the United States have the ability or the stomach to defend those states if it came to ...?

**SECRETARY RICE:** This is not a matter of military -- use of military power. What has Russia achieved? Russia has demonstrated it can use its overwhelming military force to bully a small neighbor and to attack civilian targets and to try and tie up commerce. It is not going to bring down Georgia's democracy. It is not going to isolate Georgia. It is, however, isolating itself, because Georgian infrastructure and Georgian economic assets will be rebuilt.

Russia's reputation, on the other hand, and the very forward-looking policy that President Medvedev laid out just a few weeks ago --

**QUESTION:** He doesn't seem --

**SECRETARY RICE:** That's what's in trouble.

**QUESTION:** He doesn't seem to care.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I don't know. Sometimes it takes a little time for diplomatic isolation to set in as a fact. Sometimes it takes a little time for a state to weigh the costs of what it's done. And sometimes, it takes a little time to demonstrate that the strategic objective of undermining Georgia will not be achieved.

**QUESTION:** The U.S. and its allies have failed to get Russia out of Georgia. It doesn't seem as though -- it seems as though you and the allies look weak --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, as I said, Zain --

**QUESTION:** -- and unable to get the Russians --

**SECRETARY RICE:** As I said, sometimes it takes a little time to see the full impact of the cost to Russia. But one of the costs to Russia is that the Russian President is beginning to sound like a broken record. First, his troops were going to be out on Monday, then his troops were going to be out on Wednesday, now his troops are going to be out on Friday. I'm beginning to wonder if the Russian President is ever going to keep his word, or can he keep his word, or what is going on there?

**QUESTION:** Maybe the Russian President is a puppet and is being controlled --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, he's --

**QUESTION:** -- by Vladimir Putin, the Prime Minister, who's really calling the shots.

**SECRETARY RICE:** He's the Russian President. He's the Russian President and he ought to keep his word. But I think what is embarrassing now is the Russian President continuing to make representations that don't turn out to be true.

**QUESTION:** Do you think it's Vladimir Putin?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Oh, I'm not going to --

**QUESTION:** Is this his design? Is this --

**SECRETARY RICE:** I'm not going to try to judge why it is that President Medvedev keeps saying things that don't happen.

**QUESTION:** The -- CNN is getting indications that the Russians are digging in, they have established or are in the process of establishing right now permanent checkpoints in and around Gori, several of them. They don't seem to be planning to leave anytime soon. And that's a clear violation, isn't it?

**SECRETARY RICE:** It is indeed a violation of the ceasefire agreement that they signed with the president of the European Union. And again, the costs to Russia of the Russian President saying things that don't turn out to be true, the costs of Russia to invading a small neighbor and then having the world rally around that small neighbor with economic assistance and with humanitarian assistance and, eventually,

with assistance to rebuild the armed forces of Georgia, that's a significant cost because Russia will have gained nothing.

**QUESTION:** Why don't you get tougher with Russia?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, we're being pretty tough with Russia.

**QUESTION:** You think so?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yeah, I don't think you're seeing much --

**QUESTION:** A lot of critics are saying that that's not -- that's not --

**SECRETARY RICE:** This is not -- this is not a matter of military power. This is a matter of demonstrating to Russia that it can't have it both ways.

**QUESTION:** Why not say we'll kick them out of the G-8 and really turn up the heat?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I don't really expect that there are going to be immediate meetings with the G-8. I'm very -- it's very clear that there aren't going to be any meetings of the NATO-Russia Council for some time to come. Russia is obviously isolating itself from the very institutions that it has sought to be a part of. And the message that came out of NATO yesterday is that Russia can't have it both ways. It can't claim that it wants cooperation, that it wants its reputation to be built on a modern basis of technology and science and culture and cooperation and then brutally attack a small neighbor.

**QUESTION:** Will you go to Moscow? I mean, why not just go and have face to face meetings and use your personal diplomacy to ratchet down the temperature? Why not do it, ignoring the diplomatic deepfreeze?

**SECRETARY RICE:** It's not a matter of ratcheting up or ratcheting down the temperature. I've been in touch with my Russian counterpart several times, and we'll continue to keep our lines of communication open to Russia.

But Russia should understand and know very clearly what it needs to do. And it needs to honor the promise that it made to remove its forces from Georgia. It needs to honor the promise that it made to allow unfettered humanitarian access. It needs to honor the promise that it made that it is going to return to the August 6-August 7 status quo ante.

**QUESTION:** How would you characterize U.S.-Russia relations right now?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, they're clearly somewhat strained at this point. But they're strained not because of anything the United States has done. They're strained because Russia seems unwilling and unable to -- unwilling or unable -- to keep its word.

**QUESTION:** The Russians would argue, and have, that it's strained because of what the U.S. has done, signing the missile defense, pushing Georgia to be part of NATO, sort of a --

**SECRETARY RICE:** You know, it's very interesting. It's very interesting. If the undercurrent here is that the United States was supposed to recognize a Russian sphere of influence, and therefore deny to countries that had finally thrown off the communist yoke integration into international institutions, integration into transatlantic structures, if the undertone here is that by pursuing the good relations with countries that were once under the Soviet yoke we've somehow done something against Russian interests, that's just wrong.

What the United States sought to do was to give countries choices. What the United States sought to do was to have good relations with the countries of the former Warsaw Pact that are now, many of them, members of NATO and the European Union. And we sought at the same time to offer the same hand of cooperation and friendship to Russia. We were the ones who have supported WTO membership for Russia, (inaudible) membership for Russia, missile defense cooperation with Russia, strategic engagement with Russia of the kind the President had in Sochi. So the United States has done everything that it can to have a friend -- have a friendship with Russia. I still hope that there are Russian leaders who recognize that isolation is not a good future for Russia.

**QUESTION:** Are you confident that -- are you confident that that will (inaudible)?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Oh, I think in time, there won't be able to be a choice. Because if Russia is going to pursue the agenda that President Medvedev laid out, they're going to have to find a way to cooperate.

**QUESTION:** Pakistan? President Musharraf resigned. Is your main concern right now that the coalition government can hold it together, that they don't turn on each other? Because they were really united for their hatred of Musharraf, and they also hate each other.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I hope they were united by the fact that the Pakistani people in their first free and fair election in quite a long time elected them all to help govern Pakistan. And we're going to support this democratically elected government. We plan to do it by helping them economically. We're going to do it by helping them with the social programs. We're also going to do it by working together on the militancy

and the extremism that is threatening not just the United States and Afghanistan, but threatening Pakistan as well.

**QUESTION:** Do you think they can deliver more than Musharraf did?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, President Musharraf was a good ally in the war on --

**QUESTION:** But he failed to -- in many respects to deliver on your priorities.

**SECRETARY RICE:** What President Musharraf did was to pull Pakistan away from the brink of extremism. I think people forget where Pakistan was in 2001, supporting the Taliban, not aggressive against al-Qaida. And a lot was achieved. And perhaps as importantly, he also took off his uniform and helped to smooth the path to civilian democratic rule in Pakistan. Now, the democratically elected Government of Pakistan does have to pay attention to this terrible militant threat.

**QUESTION:** Can you give us your reaction to the loss of life in Afghanistan, where French troops -- several of them were killed?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, first of all, I have expressed my condolences to the French Government and, you know, to the French people and to the families of those who were lost. I was able to do that in person with my colleague, Bernard Kouchner, yesterday.

I would just note the very strong statement of the French President, affirming France's intention to continue its engagement in the international coalition. Because they know what kind of fight we're in. They know that people who would do this are doing it because they would deny to all of us a secure future. And so we will keep fighting. We will keep training Afghan forces. We will keep helping the Afghans with governance. We will keep helping them try to be a -- build a decent and prosperous society that can withstand these kinds of attacks of violent people who have nothing in mind but misery for the Afghan people.

**QUESTION:** And finally, Secretary Rice, you were supposed to be in Beijing for the Olympics this week. Are you disappointed that --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yes. (Laughter.)

**QUESTION:** You didn't get to go and have some fun and watch the sports.

**SECRETARY RICE:** I'm very disappointed that I'm not in Beijing. It's a great Olympics. The Americans are looking great, and I'm following every move when I get back to the hotel room.

**QUESTION:** Did you watch Michael Phelps swim?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I did watch Michael Phelps.

**QUESTION:** Did you -- did you watch the second to last race? The 1/100<sup>th</sup> of a second in butterfly?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I actually saw it -- I saw it on replay and of course I've got my TiVo going -- (laughter) -- trying to see as much when I get home.

**QUESTION:** What else do you TiVo?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Oh, that's my own little secret. (Laughter.)

**QUESTION:** Thank you very much.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Thank you.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. I appreciate it.

2008/T24-5